

DOWN ON THEIR KNEES¹

By WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

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S I NICKERSON'S Lane! Had the ghost of that Old Harbor whaler come back to his native street, amazement must have moved his phantom features. The little houses scrambling up its length, once so drab and austere, seemed to have gone mad with their pinks and yellows and emeralds. The babies under the grape-vines were brown as shoes, and so were the old women, bright-kerchiefed, gossiping across the fences in a tongue he had heard, perhaps, when he used to put in at the Azores for water and green stuff, but never here. Manta's, Silva's, Cabral's, on the mail-boxes — and in the Nickerson house at the top, antique and white-pillared, lived now a Portuguese Peter — Peter Um Perna, as one would say — Peter One-leg. The ghostly visitant might have dropped a tear at all this, or, a philosopher, he might have turned his hollow eyes on Angel Avellar, making lace behind the pink palings of her grandmother's yard, and, murmuring, "For of such is the kingdom of the future," gone back to his grave.

Angel's grandmother had to walk with a stick, she was so old; an absurd, dried-up person with a topknot the size of a thimble, bad knees, arms like broom-handles and a hundred times as tough and never thoroughly dry. At almost any time of the day, or of the year, they might have been seen in the yard or the shed, stabbing in and out of the wash-tub, furious, uncontrollable, thrashing the

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suds about at one end and the thin old woman at the other. One wondered if she never rebelled at them. Perhaps she did. They washed for a good many people, among them Peter Um Perna; and the One-leg, since he had become so rich, changed his shirt every other day when he was ashore from his vessel.

At any rate, other folks rebelled; it made them nervous to see her work so long and so hard. But when they demanded across their fences why she would put none of it on that "lazy piece of an Angelina," she made no answer beyond tapping her nose reflectively with a dripping finger-bone. Or perhaps she might be hanging out one of Peter Um Perna's shirts, and pause to stare at it with an odd, preoccupied attention. Or again, if the vessels chanced to be coming in that day, she might hobble into the house and, finding Angel reading on the sofa, pet her lustrous hair, mumble and smile, and say, "Y'r lace, Pretty, out 'n the garden," or perhaps, "The flowe's needs pickin', Pretty."

Peter Um Perna made his men carry him ashore on their shoulders when his vessel came back from the fishing-grounds. Had a drop of water touched his single russet shoe there is no saying what would have happened. They hated him as no other skipper was hated; yet he was a lucky man to go with, a "dog" for knowing the fish, and it was a sight to see them coming up Nickerson's Lane after a "big trip," in their boots and hard, round rubber hats, loitering and shuffling so as to let him keep his wooden-legged lead of them, and bellowing across the yards of how many fish they had taken and how many dollars they had shared.

Um Perna said nothing; there was no need. He stumped along in front with his hat pulled down to hide the scar on his forehead, one thumb tucked over the gold watch-chain, the other preening his black mustache. One would think he had forgotten there were other people in the world, for he turned his eyes neither to the right nor to the left, not even when he passed the pink-fenced yard

where Angel Avellar always chanced to be, picking flowers, perhaps, or reaching up her brown, well-rounded arms to tuck a vine-tendril in place, or perhaps sitting with her head bent over her lace-hooks, the hair hiding her face except for an edge of cheek, deep-colored under the eyes of Um Perna's men — especially of Man'el Costa. For saying his name over to herself, or even thinking of Man'el, made Angel's cheeks hot this autumn of her seventeenth year.

Folks laughed at Angel for sitting out of doors when the flowers were all gone and the grass-plot dried up. But it was on one of these afternoons, with the sun as low as a man's head and a cold wind spattering sand among the roofs, that Man'el Costa leaned his ditty-bag on the palings and asked Angel to go to the St. Michels' dance with him.

"What y' say?" he urged. His soft, dark cheeks grew darker still at the snickers of his mates behind him.

Angel wanted to laugh and to weep at the same time. She could not have lifted her eyes if a hundred red-hot needles had pricked her. Man'el Costa! Man'el Costa! If she could only so much as nod her head. Her heart jumped up and choked her; Man'el was turning away, not understanding. She must, somehow, get to her feet.

"M-m-man'el!" she stammered, her face stricken with fire.

It was not Man'el there facing her, but Peter Um Perna himself, who had waved Man'el away. He looked her over at his leisure.

"What's y'r name?" he inquired, with a faint sneer. When he saw the girl trembling and quite unable to answer, the sneer broadened.

"I guess that's one o' my good shirts dryin' on the line there. Better bring it to my house after supper, whatever y'r name is, because I'll want to wear it to-morrow."

Angel got into the house somehow. At first, on the front-room sofa, even the tears refused to come, she was

so bruised and robbed. Man'el had not understood, and he would never ask her again, and there were so many girls. By and by the world grew warmer and blacker, and she could sob till she was worn out to her fingertips, and Avo Avellar's hand on hers in the gloom was something holding her up from the deep. The Avo began to croon after a time, a curious mumbling overtone of exultation.

"I hear 'im, Pretty. I was behind the curtain. Y' don't know men yit, or y' would n't take on so. 'Ain't he spoke to y'u, Pretty? He claims t' hate women, an' yit he's spoke t' my Pretty. Dry y'r tears, dearie. Did n't y' hear he wanted y' should bring the wash t'night? This Peter wants t' see my Pretty again, does he? Hee-hee-hee-hee!"

It was so hard for tired Angel to understand. What was the Avo talking about? Turning over, she stared at the shadowy ceiling, her eyes growing wider and wider, and her wrists cold, as if in an ice-pack.

"Who you mean?" she whispered. "Not — not the One-leg, Avo!"

"Yis, the One-leg, Pretty. The One-leg that lives in the big house up there and pays four dollars f'r a shirt, they tell, up to Boston. If more men was to git a leg caught into a jibin' boom — what a world — what a world! Mebby they'd all git mad then, an' proud, an' mebby own their three good vessels same's Peter. A touch o' gold that was, Pretty. He's the same's the rest of 'em afore that — remember? And to-day — to-day, he's spoke to Angel Avellar. Come, lay out y'r Sunday frock while I git the supper ready. Hee-hee —"

She hobbled off, bubbling over her stick, to rattle her supper pots in the kitchen. The illumination from the doorway lay across the carpet; Angel, turning on her side, watched the shadow crossing and re-crossing the bright patch, huge and misshapen and curiously agile.

"Was *that* the reason why she always sent me out into the yard then?" It was an astounding question, heavy

and bitter and dark, made up, as it were, of all the questions of all the young girls standing on the thresholds of all the ages. It seemed impossible for her to go out into the light, but she had to when the Avo called.

"I don't want t'—t' take the wash," she pleaded, bending her head lower over the cod-cheek chowder. Abashed by the unexpected silence, she hazarded a peep through her lashes. The old woman began to laugh with a shrill, angry sarcasm, throwing one skinny arm over her head like a dancing-girl.

"Oh yis, yis! *I go!* That's what y' want? I'm so strong an' straight an' pretty. I heave my stick in the pig-yard an' skip like Tony Button's goat—an' who knows if Peter One-leg won't ast me for his wife. Ahhh! Hee-hee-hee!" She dropped her irony in a wink for a kind of wrinkled tenderness. "Ah, my Pretty—I f'rgit my Pretty's a little girl yit. But you won't be nervous now, will you? I was same's that when I was young, too; I shivered and cried when I was lucky—same's you, Pretty. It'll be all right. You go 'long. Go 'long! Here, le'me fix y'r hair a second. Y'r dress is pretty. Pretty dress!"

When Angel went up the lane, carrying the bundle on her head, all the little houses with their bright eyes crowded close to watch her pass, and the moon sent a ramping, shameless shadow ahead to drag her slow feet along. The austere autumnal wind shamed her, making nothing of her Sunday frock and stinging her with its blast till she would have turned and run down again had it not been for a wisp of arm waving her on from the familiar shadows below.

Peter's sister Philomena opened the back door slightly, almost before Angel could knock. Philomena was a narrow-chested, niggardly, black-clothed creature, standing forever on the brink of disaster. Her brother's affluence, his three vessels, even this house, remained incredible to her, a golden spell to be shattered by a breath of skepticism. She never spent money without a haunting fear lest

the shopman chance to bite the coin and find it dust. She gave Angel no time to speak.

"I know what y'r after," she challenged, squeezing her tall, chalky face in the crack. "Na-na — we don't want you snoopin' round here. Go 'way!" But when Angel, unspeakably relieved, turned to go, the woman was out, plucking at her elbow with frightened fingers. "Na-na — come in! I s'pose you got to come in. Oh, dear me — my brother Peter —"

Peter Um Perna sat in front of a base-burner in the living-room, his wooden peg side by side with his russet shoe, and both of a color in the glow from the door, his hands folded across his white waistcoat, and his head sunken forward in a pose of meditation or perhaps fatigue.

"Oh, yes," he murmured, hearing Angel behind him. He kept her standing in a torment of uncertainty, neither offering to rise himself nor asking her to sit. "What's y'r name?" This was one of his finest thrusts, to seem not to know one's name.

"Angeline," the girl stammered, keeping her eyes on a dim Virgin and dimmer Child between the long windows, blue with the moon, so she would not have to look at him. "Angel — Angel Avellar, s-s-sir!"

"Angel, eh?" The scar on his forehead gathered up all the light and burned like a crooked beacon. "Not a bad name," he mused. "You must 've just come t' Old Harbor; I never seen you before t'-day."

His face did not change at this quite wanton lie, but the girl's did in a curious way. Perhaps, after all, there is as true a travail when the child gives birth to the woman as is the woman's giving birth to the child. Hitching his bad leg over the good, the man became engrossed in its shining metal tip.

"You'll hear folks talkin' about me before you been here long, Angel. That's the name, ain't it? All of 'em talks about me because I's so good to 'em an' because I'm so handsome. It's my gold foot catches their eye.

Look! Won't see another foot in Old Harbor shines like that in the light. Brass, eh? Might's well be gold. Then they like the rose-mark on my forehead. The saints 've got halos, remember."

Half turning of a sudden, he clapped his hands together, crying, "Come, come! Stand over here where I can take a look at you. Mmm. That's better." He stared her over slowly from head to foot, one hand busy preening his mustache, the other slapping nervously on the chair-arm. "I'm thinkin' o' gittin' married one o' these days." He paused to watch the color sweeping the girl's face. There was a light in his eyes of an inexplicable glee. "Yes, I'm goin' t' git a woman when I can find the kind I want, or I won't have 'er. Her hair won't be black, either, but the color o' gold, and curly, and her eyes the color o' sky. She'll be lighter color all told 'n you are, an' not near so lean—and rich. She'll keep a girl t' do up her hair, and a man jus' to black her shoes. An' she'll come crawlin' on her knees for me t' marry 'er, this woman!"

Angel could not understand. She had no way of defending herself against this singular and meaningless brutality. The man seemed amused at her horror and her pathetic, inarticulate passion. He carried on in a shrill mood.

"*You* ought n't to have no trouble gettin' a man, now. You're good enough aplenty for some poor devil, like a young fellow in my vessel now; I forget his name—Man'el somethin'. Now why don't y' go to work an' get out 'n the yard when the vessels comes in. Mebby this boy might happen t' see you an' take a fancy. Who knows? He may like 'em lean an' black, an' he poor, too. . . . That's all! You c'n go now!" He shook his hands at her with an unaccountable ferocity. "D'y' hear? You c'n go! Mena! Mena! Where 'n the devil— Why don't y' let this girl out?"

Man'el Costa was waiting outside Peter Um Perna's gate, rather heroic in the moonlight, leaning against a tree-

bole and wondering how he should hail Angel Avellar, for he had seen her going in with the wash. Man'el was not used to girls quite so timid as Angel; he found it rather exciting, and the feeling deepened the natural fire of his eyes and whipped his fine dark cheeks with red.

"Oh, hello there!" he called, suddenly, catching sight of a figure at the gate. "What's the hurry, Angel. What's—what's eatin' you?" he finished, bewildered to find his hands imprisoned, and Angel's eyes shining close with a light he could not fathom.

"Was you waitin' for me, Man'el?"

"Yeh!" He had planned to lie about that.

"Come, let's go. Quick, Man'el, let's go!"

She tugged at his hand, and he followed a few steps down the hill, peering sidewise. It was like a dream, with the weird illumination and the wind and the naked vine-stems shivering among the yards. And this was Angel Avellar! He felt foolish, never to have seen through her before, and at the same time filled with a wild chill of discovery.

"Look here!" he cried, suddenly, tugging her to stop. "What you laughin' for?" And then, still more uncertain, "What—what you cryin' for, or are you laughin', anyway?"

The girl's hands, pressed against her bosom, rose and fell as though she had been running.

"Will you kill that one-leg pig, Man'el?"

"Sure!" He concluded that she was laughing, after all.

"Now?"

Man'el's jaw gave way. It was more than ever like a dream; he began to wish he could wake up so as to be certain of it, and then go on dreaming again. The night below gave up a shape waving ecstatic arms and screeching: "Go way f'm here. Git away f'm my girl! Go way—go home!"

They paid her no more attention than they would have

paid an unseasonable insect bumbling in the night or the faint surf on the beaches.

"*Now?* Will you *now?*" Angel's eyes held him inexorably.

"W-e-l-l—ugh! Say, look here, what's eatin' you t'-night? What's *he* done to you? Say, can't y' talk sensible?"

Angel's fingers plucked at his coat lapels.

"Listen! Did I ever ask him to talk about me? Did I? Did I ask him to say if I was pretty or ugly? An' if he likes yellow hair, what's that to *me?* Oh! *oh!* If I was rich and had yellow hair, then I c'd come crawlin' on my knees to 'im, could I? Oh! As if anybody'd look at that cripple pig! Did I ask 'im if I was ugly? *Oh! Oh! Oh!*"

Man'el threw back his head to laugh at the stars, relieved.

"So you're ugly, eh? Ugly?" He put something out of the way with his strong arm, crying: "Leave us be, old woman. Can't y' see we're talkin'? . . . Ugly, eh? Well, I'm on'y a poor fellow, but if *you*'re ugly, then I want a ugly one. You're good enough for me—plenty good enough for me! Well, I should guess!"

"Don't say it that way!" she protested, fiercely. "*Not that way!*"

"Any way y' like, then!" Man'el laughed triumphantly, taking her hands in his and swinging them back and forth.

Angel could not sleep that night. She lay wide-eyed awake and sometimes shivering in her bed under the windy shingles, wondering at the strange new face of the world. Her grandmother did not even go to bed, but sat in the kitchen, rocking very slowly back and forth, peering into the coals and sucking her gums. A little before dawn she killed and dressed a pair of pullets and carried them away with her down the lane, wrapped in an old shawl. She was back before Angel was up.

"Look 't this bottle, Pretty," she said. "I got it to

the drug-store, an' folks says it 'll make y'r hair yellah. See. Avo got it for Pretty."

Sitting bolt up in bed, Angel stared at the bottle for a long time after the Avo had hobbled down-stairs again.

"Oh, yes. I remember now."

Her anger with the Avo grew beyond bounds. She ran around the room in her bare feet, hunting for a place to break the bottle. In the end she let it drop down between the floor and the eaves, and then sat on the edge of the bed, staring at nothing.

Even the oldest crones in the neighborhood could see the difference in Angel after that, and wagged their heads and pursed their lips, for, though their eyes were dim, their wits were sharp for a thing of this kind.

What they saw in Angel was something hard, glittering, something purposeful. For a year she had been putting away nickels and pennies against the St. Michels' excursion to New Bedford in the spring, and now everybody knew, from Evelina Silva, who worked in Matheson's store, how she had spent it all in one morning for a piece of yellow silk and a pair of patent-leather pumps with French heels. She brushed her teeth, too, and the grocer-boy who caught her in the kitchen one morning rubbing her cheeks hard with a rough towel did not fail to tell of it.

She could n't fool the old women. Perhaps they were a little disappointed when she did not try. Any one with eyes was free to see her, when Peter Um Perna came up the lane, standing slim and brazen in the doorway, "showing off" the waist she had made from the yellow silk, and those patent-leather pumps with the French heels. A spot of color like a rose-petal burned in either cheek, and the lights in the hair framing the lovely oval of her face were like blue sabers in a mist. She stared at Peter as he passed, looked him over with the bland incuriosity of a stranger till her eyes came to that brass-shod peg, when she smiled a little to herself. One could see the cords in Peter's cheeks tighten and stand out, that

was all. He went on fingering his mustache and toying with the watch-chain as if he did not know she was there. How they hated each other, Angel Avellar and Peter Um Perna!

Man'el Costa wanted to laugh. He was delighted with Angel, and more and more with every passing week he wondered that he could have looked at any other girl. And yet, from time to time, a ripple of uneasiness passed across his simple soul. He spoke of it one evening in the Avo's front room, where he came to see Angel quite often now and sit on the sofa with his arm around her, oblivious to the old woman's vindictive screechings from the kitchen.

"You — you're sure y' like me, Angel? Y' ain't be-ginnin' t'— to —"

There was no need to finish the question; the answer was in the dark, reproachful eyes which seemed to be looking through him and beyond. She spoke after a moment in a musing tone.

"He told me I was ugly. Did I ask him? Did I ask him? Say!" She jumped up to straighten a corner of carpet with a toe. "I tell you," she cried, wheeling on Man'el. "You want t' know what I wisht? I wisht that — that *thing* there — would come crawlin' on *his* knees — to *me* — *me*, Man'el. Just *once*, Man'el!"

Man'el stared at his finger-nails and laughed uncertainly. "I'd like t' see you *then*, Angel, old girl."

The Avo, hobbling in, held up her two shaking hands. "*Look* at 'em," she quavered. "All et up with the wash. An' who did I wash f'r — t' keep her soul 'n' body to-gither? Eh? What does *she* care? Eeee! Eeee! She'd be glad if I was dead 'n' gone! Wisht I was! I wisht I was."

Angel was not the only one changed by that early winter. People said that Peter Um Perna was going crazy with his money. "'S if he did n't have enough a'ready," they said. "Don' use his head no more at all, at all."

It was quite true, he did n't use his head. For after the weathers came on and other skippers hauled up or lay snug in their houses on the watch for fine days, Peter went out in everything. An abiding anger dwelt in him. Driving his dories overboard in a northeaster, he lost all his gear; and his crew, coming home empty-handed for their pains, refused to go again, even when he came stamping through the lanes calling them out, but had their women-folks pull down the front shades and sat in their kitchens, grinning and ill at ease. Man'el Costa stopped in at the Avo's back shed with his bunk-tick over his shoulder.

"Ugh-ugh," he sniggered. "Home 'n' mother's good enough f'r me."

He had not counted on Angel, who met his announcement with blazing eyes.

"You'd let him scare y' out, would you? You would, would you?"

Peter Um Perna grinned in an odd way when Man'el came to say he would go. They went out the day before Christmas with four Lisbon "ginnies" harried out of a back-street boarding-house, not in the big schooner, of course, but in Peter's second craft, the *Mena*, which his uncle went dragging in through the summer. Angel went down to watch them go off from the beach in their dory. They looked tiny and shaky against the sky and water, both of a pitiless gray.

It began to snow about midnight—a soft, windless downfall, blinding at a dozen yards. The telephone-girl at the drug-store had the news before nine in the morning—the *Mena* on the bar at Plymouth, and breaking up fast with the flood tide. Yes, they had gotten the men ashore.

Word of shipwreck had run white-lipped through Old Harbor time out of number in the past. But this Christmas day there were no white lips or eyes aching for tears, unless they were up there at the top of Nickerson's Lane, where sister Philomena stood behind the long windows

and watched the people clear away their snow, limping grotesquely, putting fingers to noses, and hallooing down the dazzling passage. Philomena knew what it meant. Fate could not fool Philomena. Had she not been waiting for this? Had she not been fondling the darling fear of this disaster in the bottom of her heart? The golden spell was beginning to fade.

Angel Avellar sat in the front room at her house, chin in hand, brooding over the unseasonable flowers in the carpet.

"I'm glad," she repeated over and over. "Glad! Glad! *Glad!*"

That night the festival of *Menin' Jesus* brightened all the windows along the lane, making a joyful, steep corridor, walled in, for once, from the hungry ocean and the ruthless sky. There was music, too, of mandolins and island lutes, and men chanting the "*Parcido im Belam!*"

Avo Avellar had been hard at her housework all day, dusting and scrubbing, making her tiny altar of boards, getting out the new wheat carefully sprouted in saucers, and the candles, the bizarre little Virgin and Child, saints and cows and asses, brought with her from the islands. The wine also, in the huge black bottle, was island wine.

Not many came to the Avo's—a few old gossips to mumble over the cake and wine, and three or four young fellows, shy of Angel at first till they found how the wind of her humor blew, when they all made fun of the One-leg louder and louder as the candle-fires danced in the girl's eyes, strummed their mandolins, and drank of the old woman's wine.

They fell silent of a sudden and wished they were somewhere else when Peter Um Perna stood in the doorway.

"*Bóm noite!*" he said to the company.

Conveyed by the ecstatic Avo, he entered and took a chair before the altar. He remained as the life-crew

had taken him from his doomed vessel, one sleeve split, his collar gone, and his shirt laid open at the throat. They were astounded to see him so mild, as though his losing battle with the sea had somehow rested him. For a long time he sat staring into the candle-ranks. Once he murmured, "Good cake, Avo," and again, "Good wine, old woman!" He drank the wine eagerly, but seemed to forget the cake. Once he started and looked about. "Where all the folks went to?" he wondered, vaguely.

The Avo got rid of the question with a wave of her skinny hands, and filled his glass again. One could not help wondering at the frail old woman all through that night. Now she was at Peter Um Perna's elbow, a pervading minister; now she was in the kitchen, where the company had crowded to wait and watch and whisper, crossing her lips with a savage finger, grinning and chuckling through her gums, or shaking her fists at Angel, who remained in the front room, sitting in an angle between the altar and one of the front windows.

There was something luxurious about Angel's attitude, leaning back at her ease, and something at the same time triumphant. One could think of her as having saved up precious moments against this night, moments of deep scorn or anger, and moments of especial beauty. Now and then her lips curled slightly with her contempt, but beyond this her face remained perfectly impassive, even when Peter Um Perna looked up at her once and down again quickly with a curious flush on his cheeks.

By and by, lulled by the wine and the candle-light, he seemed to forget where he was. His face grew oddly boyish, soft, and untired—he was remembering the red tiles and the rank, sweet gardens of Fayal.

Avo crooned a strange pæan over the kitchen fire! "Drunk in my house! Drunk in my house!" Some of the old women dozed; she hustled them awake. Others wanted to go home, it was so unearthly an hour, but she held them with incredible stratagems, even standing with

her feeble back against the door. The cup was not to be snatched from her lips now.

Peter was looking at Angel as though he had never seen her before. "You're pretty," he mused. "My, my, but you're pretty."

She started ever so little in her chair, then lay back and covered a yawn. "Think so?" she murmured, gazing at the ceiling.

His face twitched and colored, as if for an instant he tried to pull himself together. He let himself go on again with a waving hand.

"I wished you liked me a — a little bit. If you — if you —"

"Who, *me?* Liked *you?*" The candle-light showed Angel's smooth, round neck trembling with pent laughter. It seemed incredible that this was the Angel Avellar of half a year ago. "Me like *you — you?*"

"Yeah-yeah!" He strained toward her. "God, if you c'd on'y like me enough t' get married with me! Could n't you now — could n't you?"

"Why don't y' get down onto your knees, then?"

"Yeah-yeah — wait a secon'. Yeah-yeah!"

He had forgotten that wooden peg of his; it caught between the chair-rungs and flung him down on one shoulder at Angel's feet.

The devils were loose in Angel Avellar. Leaning over the prostrate man, she seemed to drink of the gray, twitching horror on his face.

"What 'd I say?" he whispered, not yet moving.

"You crawled on your knees for me t' marry you, Peter Um Perna!"

She gazed into his eyes with a smile of sweet poison. But it was not enough; she was still thirsty. She had meant to spurn him now with a laugh, but the cornered look in his eyes gave her a far finer thrust. "And I *will* marry you, Peter One-leg. You hear? I *will!* I *will!*"

He scrambled up with his back to the wall. He

seemed dazed to find curious, exultant faces packing the kitchen door, the Avo's witnesses.

"I never!" he mumbled his denial. "I never, either!"

Angel turned and blew out the candles on the altar, showing the room cold with dawn. She shivered a little with her triumph. "Oh, well!" She shrugged her shoulders. "If you don't—" She was making sport of him, Peter, before these people. *Him! Peter Duarte!* Devils were loose somewhere else now.

"All right!" he bawled. "Come on t' the priest, damn you, *right now!*"

They studied each other's eyes. The girl's lips scarcely moved.

"You — you think I would n't?"

"You think *I* would n't?" Peter whispered, too. Then they both repeated it, wondering, almost appealing.

"You — think — I — *would n't?*"

"You — think — *I* — would n't?"

Old Harbor will forget many things before it forgets that morning of passion. Angela Avellar and Peter Um Perna were married in the yellow chapel up-street, as soon as things could be gotten ready, still scarcely knowing what they did, driven helpless on an obscure tempest, becoming one flesh in hate. When they walked home to the Nickerson house it was between two lines of people who shouted, "Kill the cripple, old boy!" at sight of Man'el Costa, sleep and rage in his eyes, barring their path half-way up the hill. When he could not stand up before those two intolerable masks, the crowd jeered and hooted to see him ducking away from the Avo's triumphant stick.

It was after this that Man'el began to drift aimlessly from house to house, lowering and rumbling, stopping wherever they would give him the lees of last night's wine and listen to his threats.

"Like t' see 'im go fishin' t'-day. Ain't so anxious t' go t'-day, is he?"

They spurred him on; he grew wilder as the wine moved him more and more. "Go fishin'! I'd go with the bastard. Tell 'im Man'el Costa 'll go. Take the little *Sea Bird* now — jest the two of us — man an' man. Go fishin', eh? I'd go! Tell 'im Man'el Costa 'd go."

A blind man would not have known there were people in the Nickerson living-room that morning, even though he had sat there an hour. Sister Philomena huddled down in a far corner, clutching an ancient shawl about her frame with both hands, as if to say, "They can't take this away from me — *leastways* not *this!*"

Avo Avellar sat between the "children" with her chin propped on her stick. She was as motionless as the dead, except for her eyes, which went unceasingly from one to the other. She had spent herself in her one wild night, and now she was bankrupt, and content.

And all the while, for an hour, perhaps two hours, Peter and Angel stared at the same flower in the middle of the carpet.

Peter was the first to move. He got up to wander about the room at his halting gait, putting a hand on the wall here and there, standing for a long time in front of that dim Virgin between the windows.

"Make y'rself to home," he said, suddenly, with his hand on the door-latch. Angel met his eyes with a regard as colorless as his own.

"I will," she said.

Philomena's fire had gone out and the room grew very cold. The Avo roused herself, mumbling, "Avo go git some o' y' things, Pretty," and hobbled out by the back way. Presently Philomena vanished, too, noiseless as a scared mouse, leaving Angel alone with the flower in the carpet.

She was not to continue so long. The door swung open violently, discovering Philomena's face chalkier than ever and her hands clawing appeal.

"Don' let 'im go!" she screamed. "Aw, don' let 'im go. Please, girl — good, pretty girl — don' let 'im go in this! God sake!"

Angel found herself at a window with a giddy sense of having been wafted there by some mysterious violence.

"Wha-what you wa-wa-want?" she stammered.

"Don' let 'im go! Don'—" The woman's passionate drone filled her ears. She wondered with an odd detachment why the folks in the pallid sunshine outside were shrugging and grinning at the house.

"Don't keep saying that!" she cried. "Now what's the — O-oh!"

The world was leprous. Here and there on its gray skin a spot of pallor glowed and dimmed as the sun fought to keep it. A spot ran down to the Avo's palings, and another far out there at the Point lent to the Light and its outbuildings a momentary and unnatural radiance. Still farther beyond, the mainsail of a sloop slanted across the fugitive glory and passed out, as if a gray hand had reached to take it.

"Him? Mena — is that *him*?"

So this was why the people grinned. As though her ears could hear through walls and spaces, Angel caught up the words from their lips: "Left 'er on his weddin'-day! Well, well, well, well, I never!" A spot of fire showed on her cheek, regular and clear-cut, like the mark of a slap.

For a time now she made no effort to control herself. Months of hate and wounds and bitterness had their hour of bloom. Once, in the half-gloom of the upper hall, she wheeled on Philomena, who followed her everywhere like a frightened dog. "Don't let 'im go, you say? Ha-ha-ha! You make me laugh. Don't let 'im come *back* — thatt's what I pray on my knees to the sweet Virgin of Pity."

Her sick fury drove her from room to room. She stood at an upper window and saw the storm getting itself together out of that vast gray yeast of the world.

She saw the chimney-smudges topple for a moment and then lie down flat and thin, and she heard the first impact of the wind against the shingles overhead. And there came Avo Avellar, fighting with the wind for the bundle on her head, pathetic bits of finery done up in a pillow-case, Angel's trousseau. For the first time, seemingly, she realized that the thing was done, completed; that she could not somehow wake up and find it a nightmare.

The house became quite dark. She wanted to lie down somewhere and cover her head with blankets to keep out the sound of the wind. In a bed-room where she came there was a photograph of Peter standing on the bureau. She took it in her hands, tore it once across, and, sinking down in a rocker by the window, remained there for a long time, holding the pieces in her hands. Her sense of helplessness deepened when she glanced down by and by and discovered the futility of her anger; the face in the picture was not touched.

It had been taken, evidently, before Peter was hurt. It carried her back to the front room at the Avo's, and the altar and the candles and this face here in her hand dreaming into the light. For here was the same look of the boy in the man, the same air of an artless and delightful indecision, of expectancy, of human accessibility.

Angel lay down on the bed and began to cry. She was so utterly worn out that she wanted to die, or to sleep, but the wind would not let her die and it would not let her sleep. The house shivered with it; the bed shivered with it. She pulled a comfort over her head, but the wind came through that feeble barrier, carrying its voices, the singing sleet, the thunder of ocean flinging on its beaches; and other voices — voices insistent, remote, and ghostly. One crept into the room with her, wailing. "He's dead 'n' gone — dead 'n' gone — dead 'n' gone —"

It was so real that she flung off the comfort and stared about wildly. Philomena crouched in a corner, invisible save for the gray patch of her face. The burden of her

wailing changed. "What 'd you make 'im go f'r? What 'd you make 'im go f'r?"

Angel lifted on her arms. "No, no, Mena! I never made him go. I never! Could I help it if he could n't stand the sight o' me? *Could I, Mena?*"

"He went because *you* could n't stan' the sight o' *him*! An' you know it, you — you terrible, wicked thing, you!"

The tempest seemed to withdraw for a moment and leave the bedroom with its two dim, gray faces hanging in a windless hush. Angel's voice seemed far off, as though there were another person speaking.

"What — you — talkin' about?"

"Dead 'n' gone, dead 'n' gone. Oh, dear, dear!" Philomena rocked from side to side. "You made 'im go in a gale o' wind. You made 'im crazy so long, so long, an' you would n't look at 'im because he 's a cripple."

"What you talkin' about?"

"What a shame, a shame! If folks on'y knowed how good he was an' how sweet-tempered when he 's alone an' nobody watchin' him. I've hear' 'im talk s' sweet it's a'most poetry. But when folks's watchin' him, it's same 's a crooked devil in Peter, an' he had t' make fun of 'em first before they made fun o' him. An' now he 's dead 'n' gone, dead 'n' gone!"

Angel slid from the bed and shook the woman's arm, as she might have aroused a sleeper. "But what about *me*?" she demanded.

"About you?" Philomena's voice lifted wild and sore above the gale, like a prayer for vengeance. "Why 'd you stan' in your yard f'r two long year, then? Two year ago he come home one night an' set in front o' the fire, sayin' to himself, 'That little girl!' over 'n' over till you 'd want t' laugh. You would n' think t' see a growed-up man cry, would you? I've see my brother cry time aplenty, behind his four walls here. An' other times he would n' cry, but say: 'Na-na. She likes this here Costa boy, an' what is it t' me? F'rgif it, Peter!' An' then he 'd set f'rgittin' it. What 'd you do it f'r, girl?"

"Answer *me* a question. Why 'd he call me ugly that night then?"

"Answer *me* a question. Why would n' he eat no supper that night? An' why 'd he act the way he done after you 'd went, carryin' on same's a drunk man, spittin' onto his peg-leg, an' tryin' t' bust it off in the door, an' cursin' God that 'd struck 'im a cripple for pretty Angel t' make sport of? Answer *me that* question, then!"

Angel cried for pity. "Mena, you're lyin' to me!"

"Ya-ya, an' mebbly it's a lie he's went out in a forty-foot sloop-boat an' got drowned!" The finality of things seemed a tonic to the woman; disaster purged her of the old fear of disaster and gave her a shrewish malignance. "All right," she screeched. "All right! He ain't the on'y one, though. There's two went if there's one, and now where's that pretty brown-face Man'el o' yourn? Ha-ha-ha! Ow-w! Don't do that!"

"Did Man'el go with him? Say! Quick!"

"He did. Ya-ya-ya! He did!"

Angel's face grew grayer still with a horrible misgiving. "But why? What's the reason he went?"

"Ya-ya, you can holler plenty now. There's two of us now. Hark! What's that—down-stairs, poundin' on the door?" she whispered.

Angel whispered, too. "The door's locked." They had an absurd sense of being conspirators.

"It—it can't be—"

"Oh, Mena, Meeena, it c-c-could n't be—"

They clung to each other, forgetting the past.

"Why don't you go, Angel?"

"*You* go, Mena!"

"Na-na, please *you* go!"

Angel crept down the stairs and, while the summons still continued on the door-panels, brought the lamp out from the front room, set it on the marble-top table. Being distracted, she gave an illusion of almost grotesque self-control. She spoke to the door as if the boards had

ears. "Wait! Wait! I hear you! Can't you wait a second?"

She had trouble with the bolt, and even when it was undone she seemed not to know enough to pull the door, but stood in the middle of the hallway with her hands pressed against her cheeks. A hungry color swept her face when Man'el Costa came in. He laughed to see it.

"Waitin', eh?" He took off his oilskin hat and shook it, spattering on the floor. "Scared I would n't come back, eh, Angel, honey?"

"But — but where — is — he, Man'el?"

"Oh, that's all right. Need n't be a-scared o' that now, Angel, old girl." He ripped his jacket open, blowing and elated. "Need n't be scared the One-leg 'll bother you no more, no more."

"Man'el!"

Angel sat down suddenly on the bottom step of the stairs. Man'el confronted her, jubilant.

"Lucky girl — lucky, lucky girl! A swell house an' a pot o' money an' no harm done. Who'd 've believed it, Angel? My, my! An' t' think I was sorer 'n hell this mornin'! But it's all right now, ain't it, old girl?"

"But, Man'el, where — is — he?"

"'Ain't I told you it's all right? How'd I know where he is *now*? Las' I seen of 'im he's ridin' to an anchor between the Peaked Hill bars with the anchor draggin' all the time an' the inner bar dead astern. I come in on a freighter. They got a boat 'longside of us an' took me off. God! how it was breezin'! Seas comin' clean acrost us! No time to do no argyin' with *him* — no time f'r beggin' a man, I tell you *that*!"

"Argyin'? *Beggin'*?" Angel's hand groped and found a spindle of the banister, whitening with the grip. "Man'el, but I don't understand. Why did n't he come in with you?"

"Why? Why? How d' I know — 'less it's the reason he's went off his head — crazy's a bedbug. Settin' there into the fo'c's'le with his head in his hands, bawlin'

like a baby. Oh, that — that you, Mena?" A decent solemnity changed his voice at the sight of Philomena's face hanging in the opening above, gray, quiet, and stricken. "It's too bad, Mena, but, Mena — I — I'm a-scared your brother—" His floundering made him nervous. "Angel," he protested, "you tell 'er!"

But Angel was gone.

From Si Nickerson's Lane it is three miles across the cape to the Peaked Hill life-saving station.

They could hardly believe their eyes in the station-house — Angel seemed more a wind-driven ghost than any human wanderer, with her white lips and her vague, pleading eyes and her back against the booming panels of the door by which she had entered. For the third time now she repeated her words, very slowly and distinctly, and with a kind of desperate patience and a child-like faith that if she could just make these stubborn men understand what she wanted it would be all right.

"You see — we got to hurry — quick. Because the reason my husband's on the bar out there. All alone in a sloop-boat, my husband is, and his anchor's draggin'. Don't you understand?"

The station captain, Ed Cook, banged his fists in growing exasperation. "You said that twict a'ready. I hear you. And I tell you your husband's all safe 'n' sound at home by this time. I tell you we got a telephone from a freighter, and he took 'im off a sloop-boat out here. Can't you hear? You deaf? Took 'im off — brought 'im in — safe 'n' sound to home, now. Hear? Git me?"

"But you don't understand," she commenced all over again. "It's the other man's my husband. He's all alone in a sloop-boat —"

"God sake, be sensible. You don't think they'd go t' work and take one man off a boat and leave the other!"

No. 2 man, beyond the table, lowered an eyelid and put his knuckles on his forehead. The captain, nodding

understanding, got up from his chair by the stove and laid a hand on Angel's arm. An odd, new kindness was in his voice.

"It's all right, girl. We'll go out in just a few minutes, but first you got to dry your clo'es and get rested up. Better lay down a spell, had n't you?"

"I can go along, too, though, can't I?"

"Sure thing — surest thing you know! Only first, now —"

It was curious to see the rough, literal fellows grow artful in double-dealing. They got her into the captain's office, and when she would not lie down on the sofa, but sat clinging to a seaward window-sill, they took turns sitting with her, coming out of the darkened room now and then like men relieved from a heavy wheel-watch to rub their hands over the stove and whisper about it.

"God alive!" muttered No. 5 once, "the way she talks in there you'd almost think 't was so."

"But it ain't!" No. 3 shook the other fiercely by the wrist. "Good God! it ain't, you know."

It began to do queer things to them as the night wore on; that ceaseless, boring reiteration in the darkened room. The watches changed, the beach patrols came in blowing and flapping their "oilers," heard the tale, and stared curiously at the tellers. The reliefs went out, north and south, and still the clock ticked the night away, and the yeast of a strange unrest worked on in them. It was Captain Cook himself, coming out of the office with sweat standing on his forehead, who struck his fist on the table and swore defensively: "Hell! — we could n't la'nch the boat in this — anyhow!"

He had failed to latch the door and it swung open behind him, giving up a voice, husky, quivering with an eagerness that would not dim: "Please — I'm dry now, ain't I? I'm rested up! Can't we go now? Because the reason we got to hurry — hurry! He'll be onto the bar in — in half an hour, I think. Oh, please —"

"For God's sake, shut that door!" The captain

combed his beard violently. Somewhere in the back of the room one of the men hazarded:

"It's moderatin' a trifle, by the sound, ain't it?"

The captain bawled at him, "Moderatin' *hell!*" He was gone next minute, climbing the stairs to the lookout's cupola. "Hey, Tom!" he shouted up the dark ascent, "what d' y' make?"

The steady tramping overhead ceased and a voice came down very thin against the background of the gale. "She's haulin' a bit now. Moderatin' a bit, cap'n. She'll come clear with the sun, I would n't wonder."

"Yeh, but that there craft offshore? Make 'er out any, Tom?"

"Mast's away. Don't make no life aboard. They took that fellow off, y' know. She'll hit the inner bar 'n half an hour, I should —"

"'Half-hour!' What makes you say a half-hour?" The captain's feet were dancing on the stair. "Gull-damn it! You heard her."

They got out of the house on tiptoe, like a band of conspirators. They had to fight the surf-boat down the bluff against a wall of wind and spray, gray-pink with the coming dawn. They caught their breath, waiting for the break of the wave, yelled all together, ran the boat out through the white smother, up to their shoulders, scrambled aboard, hauling at one another, tugging — and one that they tugged at was Angel Avellar.

"I'm rested now," she cried in triumph.

They thrust her down between two thwarts, bawling: "Shut up! shut up!" and, catching half the crest of the coming wave, slid strongly into the trough.

When they came up with the *Sea Bird*, beyond the lather of the inner bar, they found a dead thing, ready for her grave — a log, lifting and subsiding sluggishly with the swells, her decks swept clean of gear, her masts lying over the port board with the rigging swathed about it like a hank of seaweed. They rested on their oars a couple of fathoms from her side, just keeping their head up to the

seas, and set up a desultory hailing. They began to feel more than ever idiotic; the inevitable revulsion set in. One shouted, "Hell's fire! le's get out o' this!" and others, "That's right! Damn fools, the lot of us!" The captain feathered the stern-sweep, waiting for the break to swing the boat inshore. He tried to avoid Angel's eyes, two thwarts away, and when he failed he scowled glumly at her, grumbling:

"Look what y' done!"

It made no impression on her. She turned her eyes across the little strip of water and back to him, smiling, half wistful, half joyous. "He's waitin' for us."

Swinging the boat's head in with an angry jerk, he cried: "God's sake, climb aboard then, an' get it off your mind and over with. Heave 'er aboard there, boys! God's sake! the bother of 'er!"

Very cautiously she disappeared within the companion-way of the tiny forecastle. They waited, holding on and fending off with their boat-hooks, afraid to meet one another's eyes, grumbling, "'S too bad — too damn bad."

The wrack over the water grew lighter and changed imperceptibly from pink to a pale lemon, and still they waited, not knowing what to do, till Ed Cook protested, "By Heaven! that's about enough o' *this*," and got himself over the sloop's taffrail. He teetered forward and bent down to peer into the black hole, and then, turning half around, he sat down in a heap on the house and took off his hat. "And jus' to *think*!" he wondered, "jus' to *think*!"

Angel's voice came out to him, insistent and faintly querulous, as though she tried to wake a sleeper. "Peter, Peter — look at me, Peter! Did n't you know I liked you always — ever since — ever since — Oh, Peter, Peter! — not to know *that*! Peter, look at me!"

Another voice was shallow and bewildered, like the sleeper awakened.

"Wh' — why — Angel! That little girl!" He must have been touching her with his incredulous hands down

there in the gloomy place, for the next words were: "Why, you — you're *really*! But — but what you doin' down here, An-angel?"

"Can't you see, Peter? Can't you see?" There was an inexpressible triumph in the cry. "I'm down on my knees, Peter!"

The dawn came with a rush now, striking through the mists with its keen, level blades, cutting them away in vast, high-curling slices, letting in the blue sky.